

Locked

out of

Learning

November 2019



About Us

Digital Mums exists to reduce maternal unemployment and support women into rewarding careers they can fit around their family life. We believe that learning is the key to unlocking success and we run free lessons and courses at our [Work That Works Academy](#).

This is something that our co-founders Nikki and Kathryn are deeply passionate about. They watched their mothers clean other people's tables to put food on theirs because it was the only work they could find.

Digital Mums is a purpose-driven business. Everything we do is designed to deliver social impact for our staff, our customers and their families.

In recognition of our efforts, our co-founders Nikki and Kathryn were both named 'Digital Mavericks' by Campaign Magazine, 'Women of the Year' by Red Magazine, 'Future Shapers' by Marie Claire. They were also included in the list of '40 women over 40' shaping the internet by the Telegraph's Stella magazine.



Contents

100 years ago this month the Ministry of Reconstruction's adult education committee published its Final Report on Adult Education. This report argued of the importance of adult education for the nation's welfare and security and laid the foundations for adult education in the UK for decades to come. A Centenary Commission formed earlier this year to find solutions to the education challenges of today and is due to publish its report this month. Finally, the spotlight is shining on adult learning.

In 2017, Digital Mums commissioned YouGov and the Centre for Economics and Business Research (Cebr) to examine the impact of motherhood on female careers and employment levels, with

a particular focus on flexible working as a solution to supporting mothers back into the workplace.

Maternal unemployment and discrimination in the workplace is well reported. ONS data¹ shows that employment rates for men go up after they've had children; while employment rates for mothers decline. The gender pay gap opens up when women have children and consistently rises, for 12 years after a first child is born (from 18% to 33% less pay per hour than men). There is a bigger pay gap between women without children and women with children than between women and men.

100 years on from the Final Report in Adult Education we have commissioned research to

revisit the impact motherhood has on female careers and employment levels, this time with a focus on the potential of adult learning as a solution to support mothers into rewarding work.

We explore the extent to which maternal unemployment is an issue of structural unemployment (when workers' skills no longer meet the demands of the job market), discuss the increasing significance of this issue in today's knowledge economy and outline solutions for government, employers and adult learning providers.

We conducted research via OnePoll to survey 2,000 mothers to capture data on their experiences of this issue.

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Executive summary

The context

On the surface government data demonstrates a small improvement in female employment, standing at 71.8%³. This is the highest percentage since records began in 1971. However, on closer examination there are still significant issues for mothers in the job market. Just 64% of mothers with a youngest dependent child under 4 are in employment. This is significantly lower than the UK average employment rate of 76.1% and the UK average for fathers of children the same age, which is 93%. Mothers with a youngest dependent child aged 3-4 years of age have the lowest employment rate of all adults.

Taking a career break can mean it's difficult to re-enter the job market. 34% of our research respondents have been unemployed for 10 years or more and 28% have been unemployed for 5-9 years.

These employment rates cannot be explained by mothers simply choosing to stay at home to raise a family. 82.2% of mothers with children under 2 stated they were economically inactive because they were looking after the family or home but this figure drops as their children get older and sits at just 44.5% of inactive mothers whose youngest child was 16-18. The ONS states that 1.1m mothers want to work.

Our findings

Our research shows that outdated skills and knowledge have a significant impact on mothers' ability to re-enter the world of work into 'good work'.

Over half of mothers worry about their skills dating while on a career break (52%) and this rises to 72% of mothers in London. Millennial mothers expressed the strongest concern about outdated skills, double that of mothers aged 41-50.

Their worries are founded. 21% of mothers stated that outdated skills/knowledge had stopped them getting a job. This rises to almost half of mothers in London (49%). 28% stated that outdated skills/knowledge had put them off applying for a role.

This issue also impacts their potential to re-enter work at the same seniority level.

1 in 5 mothers cited a lack of up to date skills/knowledge as a factor in taking a more junior role, which rises to 1 in 4 for 18-30 year olds.

Adult learning is a clear solution to these challenges but our research shows that 48% of respondents had not engaged in formal learning in the last 3 years and 31% of respondents had not engaged in formal learning in the last 10 years. Mothers aged 18-30 were far more likely to have engaged in adult learning within the last 3 years (55% compared to just 37% of mothers aged 51 and over).

While mothers returning from a career break are struggling in today's labour market they will become increasingly marginalised and discriminated against in tomorrow's world due to the growing speed of innovation, technological change and globalisation. Right now it's estimated that the 'half-life' of a professional skill is around five years and in 2017 experts were predicting that by 2020 more than one-third of the skills we need will have changed.

So why aren't mothers engaging in formal learning?

Our research shows they face significant barriers and many of these are common across all age ranges.

36% state they don't have the time to study. Many mothers also feel that they don't have the headspace to study (23% of respondents).

Confidence also plays a significant role across all age ranges with 20% stating confidence barriers are holding them back. They don't think they are capable of learning.

There are also some unique barriers for mothers in different age brackets.

36% state they can't afford the fees, with younger mothers struggling far more than older mothers (42% of 18-30 year-olds compared to 29% of mothers over 51).

28% of mothers aged 51 and over stated they felt too old to learn (compared to just 10% of mothers aged 18-30).

Younger mothers felt their mental health was holding them back with 22% stating mental health/anxiety as a barrier. Just 7% of mothers 51 and over said the same.

There is a large evidence base linking learning to a range of employment benefits, particularly for learning that is skills-focused. This includes helping those out of work to get a job, increase their lifetime earnings and improve their job satisfaction. Adult learning also fosters a greater level of emotional wellbeing and positive changes in mental health, which is significant given the issues mothers face around confidence and mental health.

It's clear from our research that we need to do more to support mothers to lean into learning.

Our research shows that if we simply invest in supporting mothers that are out of work to upskill we could see a £8.1bn return on investment.

Our recommendations

Government

- **Increasing investment in adult skills provision.** We must have more investment to reverse the decline in adult learning participation rates. The budget available for adult skills (not accounting for apprenticeships) is falling year on year and there has been a 50% drop in funding for adult learning since 2010.
- **Introduce ‘back to work’ bursaries.** We recommend that the Government invest in a trial of ‘back to work bursaries’ to provide mothers who are out of work with the financial means to invest in upskilling.
- **A radical reform of some apprenticeships to offer 100% distance learning.** The vast majority of apprenticeships are full-time and workplace-based. This is extremely problematic for mothers. We have provided 100% online vocational training for almost 5 years and we know it can be done. We recommend testing online apprenticeships for digital roles, which would also benefit those living in more rural areas of the UK.
- **Easier access for innovative, independent learning providers.** The Government must ensure adult learning budgets can be more easily spent with independent and innovative learning providers who currently struggle with the bureaucracy involved in accessing funding from the Education and Skills Funding Agency.
- **More research into the link between maternal unemployment/ economic inactivity and structural unemployment.** When researching this report we struggled to find further evidence exploring this issue. We recommend the Government Equalities Office conducts an examination of maternal unemployment and skills and pulls together best practice from around the world to explore innovative solutions.

Employers

- **Provide a training bursary to all women going off on maternity leave.** Providing a training bursary for mothers to invest in adult learning enables them to rebuild confidence and refresh skills while they are away from the workplace.
- **Consider the needs of mothers when designing and delivering training programmes.** Avoid in-person training days that run from 9-5, or running evening sessions, which make it difficult to fit training around caring responsibilities. Also, consider your part-time workers when providing classroom-based training as they may not work on set days.
- **Provide flexible working options to mothers undergoing training.** It’s pointless to offer learning opportunities without offering some element of flexibility for mothers to fit this learning into their life. This is particularly true of women that are working for you full-time. Whether you enable them to have more flexibility in their role in general for the duration of the training, or whether you reduce their workload to free up study during work is something that should be discussed and agreed together.
- **Add an accredited or transferable skills-based course component to women returnership programmes.** Not all participants are provided with employment on graduation from these programmes. To counter any potential negative impact of a returnership programme we recommend building an accredited, skills-based training course into the returnership programme where learning can be translated and transferred to the wider job market should participants not be hired.

Learning Providers

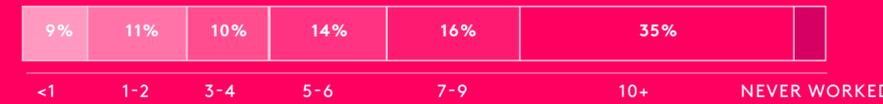
- **Take the needs of mothers into account when designing learning opportunities.** We recommend building in co-design processes to gather feedback to ensure you are not locking mothers out of learning.
- **Provide free, mobile-friendly, short courses to encourage mothers onto the learning ladder.** This helps them overcome their main barriers of cost and time and encourages them to continue learning.
- **Build a culture of inclusivity.** Negative stereotypes about mothers can be damaging in the learning sphere, just as they can be damaging in the workplace. It’s important to address this with marketing, sales and delivery teams to build a culture of inclusivity for mothers.

FROM CAREER BREAK TO CAREER BROKEN

ONS DATA ON THE EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF MOTHERS



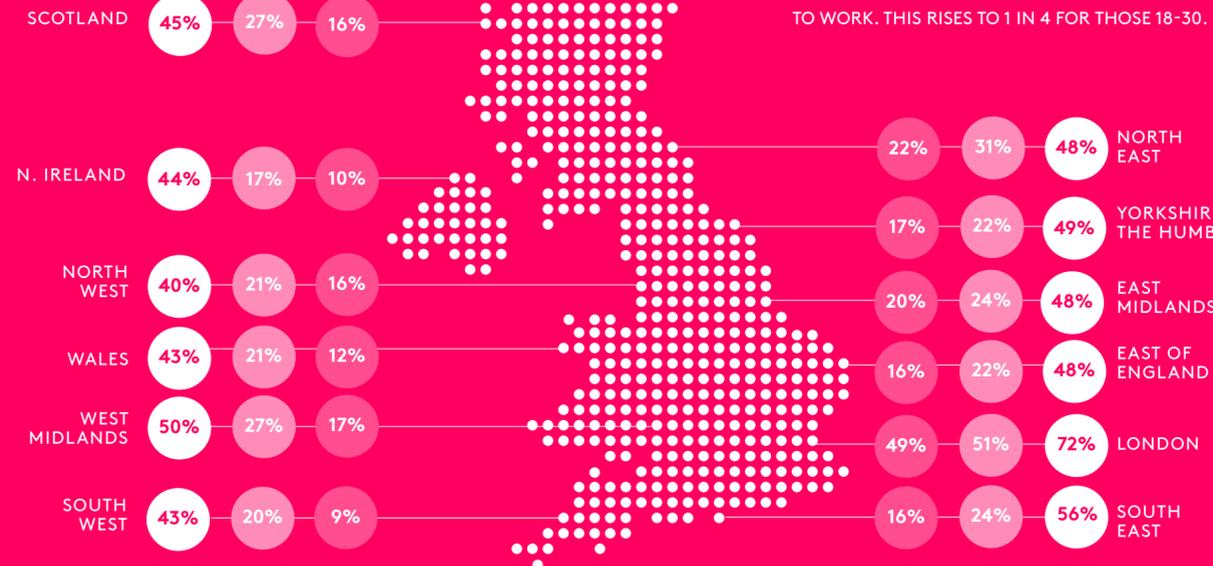
LENGTH OUT OF THE WORKFORCE? (YEARS)



OUTDATED INDUSTRY SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE ARE NEGATIVELY IMPACTING MOTHERS IN THEIR CAREERS

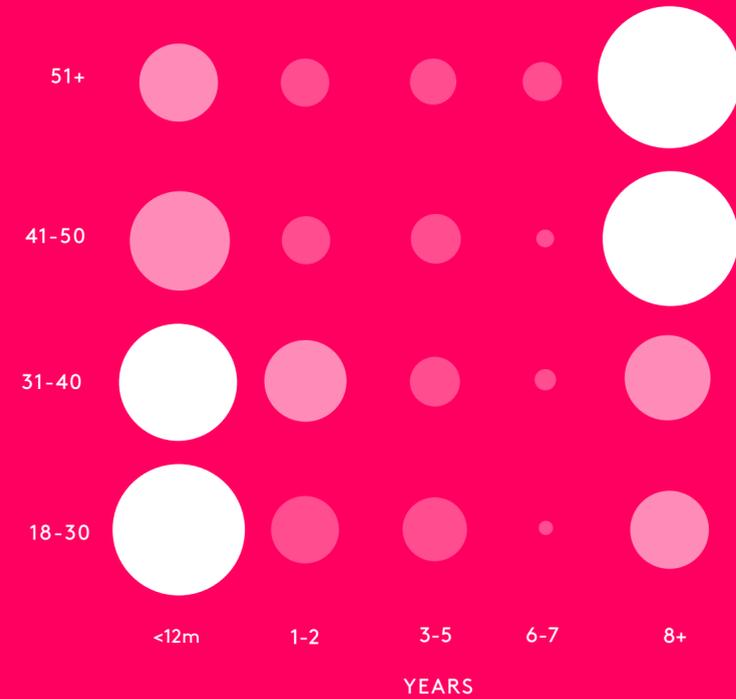


FOR 1 IN 5 MOTHERS THIS ISSUE WAS A FACTOR IN THEM TAKING A MORE JUNIOR ROLE ON RETURN TO WORK. THIS RISES TO 1 IN 4 FOR THOSE 18-30.

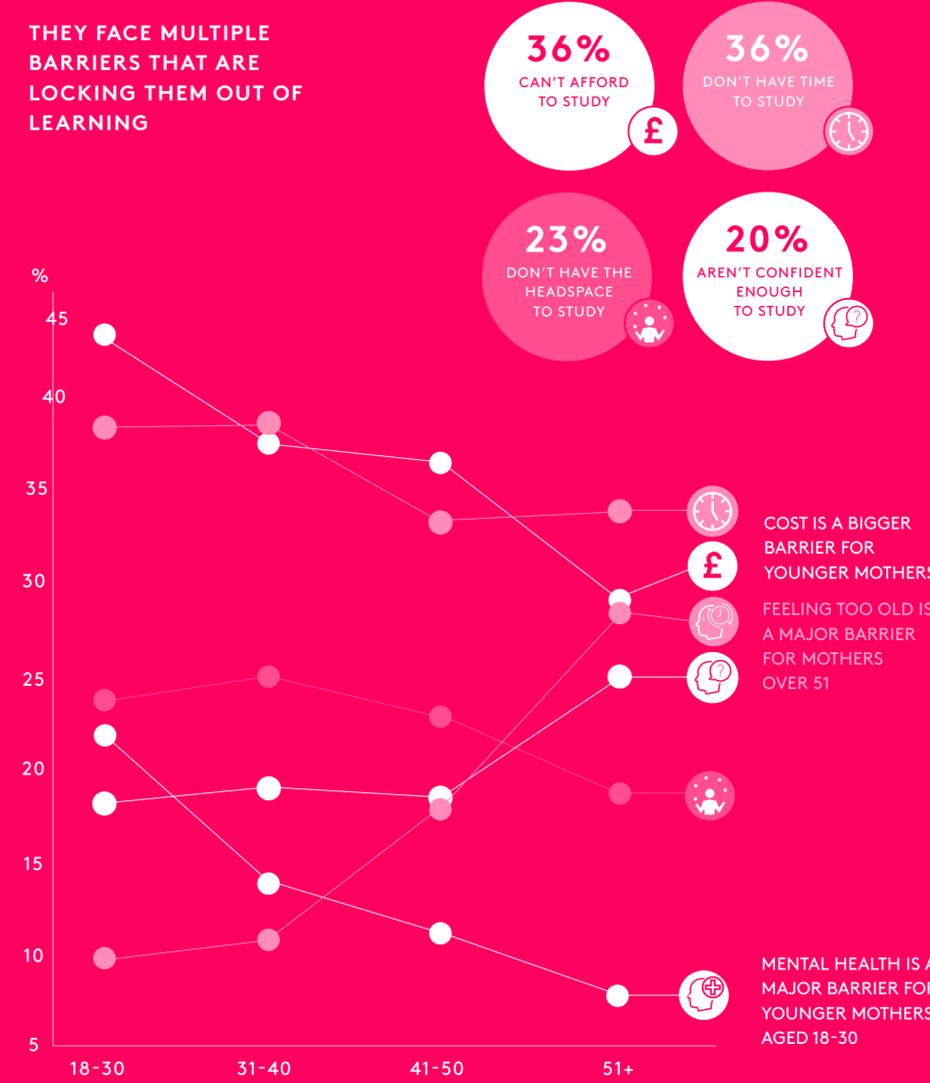


LOCKED OUT OF LEARNING

MOTHERS AREN'T PARTICIPATING IN ADULT LEARNING



THEY FACE MULTIPLE BARRIERS THAT ARE LOCKING THEM OUT OF LEARNING



THE BENEFITS OF LEARNING

EMPLOYMENT BENEFITS



OUTCOMES FOR WOMEN THAT COMPLETED AN ADULT LEARNING COURSE

EVIDENCE SHOWS THAT LEARNING DELIVERS THE FOLLOWING BENEFITS



EMOTIONAL WELLBEING BENEFITS

LIFE SATISFACTION



RESPONDENTS WERE FAR MORE LIKELY TO SCORE 1/5 IF THEY WERE OUT OF WORK

01

The state of maternal employment

Female employment

In recent decades, women have become increasingly active in the labour market.

Over the past four decades, the percentage of women aged 16 to 64 in employment has risen drastically. Since our 2017 Work That Works report, the data demonstrates a small improvement in female employment, standing at 71.8% in Q1 2019, up from 69.2% in 2017. This is the highest percentage since records began in 1971. However, employment amongst men remains notably higher than amongst females. The male employment rate currently stands at 80.3%⁴.

Additionally, a greater share of employed men are in full-time work when compared with working women. A total of 41% of women in employment are working part-time compared to 13% of men.

Maternal employment

The picture painted seems positive, however, on closer examination there has been little change for mothers.

This growth in female employment was largely due to the changes to the State Pension age for women, meaning fewer women between the ages of 60 and 65 years retired.

Just 64% of mothers with a youngest dependent child under 4 are in employment. This is significantly lower than the UK average employment rate of 76.1% and the UK average for fathers of children the same age, which is 93%. Mothers with a youngest dependent child aged 3-4 years of age have the lowest employment rate of all adults.

Our research

The ONS data on families and the

labour market doesn't capture length of time out of the workplace but we included this question in our research.

35% of mothers surveyed had been out of work for 10 years or more. 30% had been out of work for 5-9 years. Just 9% had been out of work for less than a year and 10% had been out of work for 1-2 years.

There is a common misconception that the reason mothers are economically inactive is because they want to be Stay-At-Home-Mothers, but is this true?

Unemployment versus economic inactivity

Understanding the true picture is challenging because of the way we define unemployment versus economic inactivity.

Unemployment measures people without a job that have been actively seeking work within the last 4 weeks and are available to start work in the next 2 weeks.

Economic inactivity measures people without a job that do not meet the definition of unemployment because they have not been seeking work within the last 4 weeks and/or they are unable to start work within the next 2 weeks. These two distinct states paint a murky picture for mothers. Mothers find it difficult to make major life decisions in

a short time-frame due to the complex juggle of parenting, for example, it's extremely challenging to secure childcare places at short notice. So the current definition of unemployment could be missing many mothers that really want to work but simply can't turn things around within the 2 week time frame stated. Not all economically inactive mothers choose to be.

The ONS data shows that 82.2% of mothers with children under 2 stated they were economically inactive because they were looking after the family or home but this figure drops as their children get older. Just 44.5% of inactive mothers whose youngest child was 16-18 attributed their inactivity to this reason.

Our 2017 report showed that 68% of all Stay-At-Home-Mothers stated that they would go back to work if they had access to rewarding, flexible careers that fit around their family's needs. So, even when mothers do state that they are inactive because they are looking after the family/home to what extent is this their ideal situation or something they feel they are forced into?

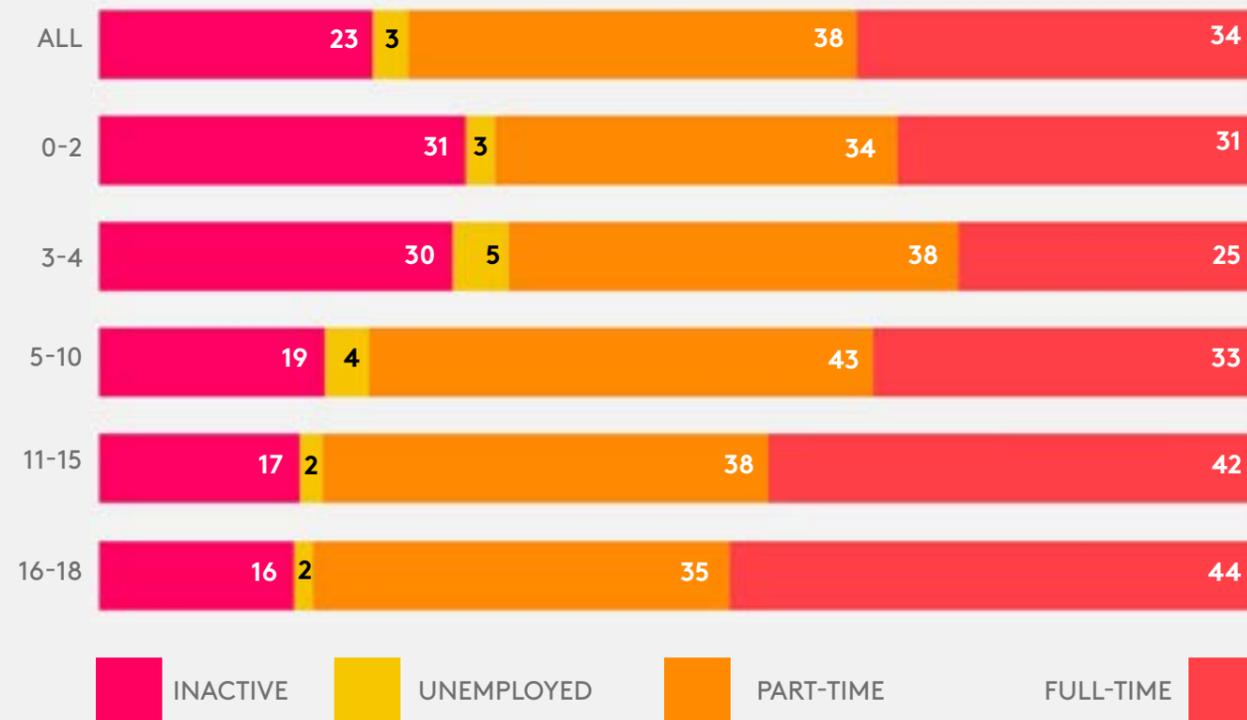
HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN OUT OF THE WORKFORCE? (YEARS)



How many mothers are out of work but want to work?

The ONS data tells us there are 6.6m mothers with dependent children in the UK. There are currently 1.7m mothers with dependent children aged 18 or under out of the workforce and 1.1m of those stated they would like to return to work.

ONS DATA ON THE EMPLOYMENT STATUS OF MOTHERS BASED ON AGE OF YOUNGEST DEPENDENT CHILD (IN YEARS)



02

From career break to career broken

There has been much focus on flexible working as a solution to maternal unemployment in recent years. While there is no denying that this is an important piece of the puzzle, offering more flexible working isn't a cure-all. The issue of skills and knowledge dating while on a career break is significantly impacting women's ability to re-enter the world of work. This is negatively affecting their careers overall.

Workers unable to find employment because they lack the necessary skills is a phenomenon known as structural unemployment.

Structural unemployment occurs when workers lack the necessary skills to find employment or live too far from regions where jobs are available and are unable to move closer.

Structural unemployment is a bigger challenge in today's world due to the fast-changing nature of the economy. It's particularly exacerbated by the high rate of technological obsolescence and increased competition of today's digital, globalised world.

Recommendations

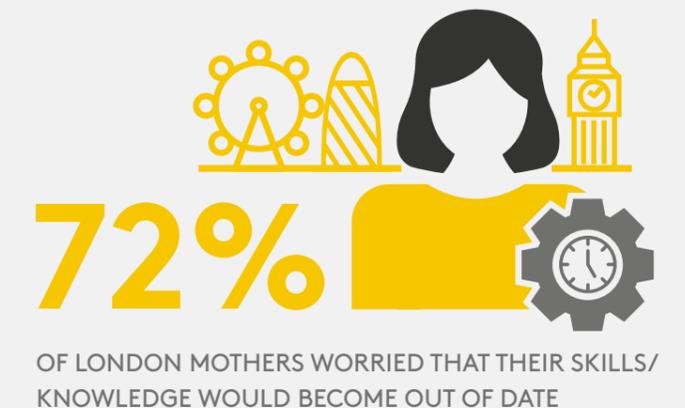
Little has been done to explore the link between maternal unemployment and structural unemployment. We recommend the Government Equalities Office conduct a wider scale examination of this issue, pulling together best practice from around the world to explore innovative solutions.



The concern around dated skills and knowledge is felt by the mothers we surveyed.

52% of mothers worry about their skills/knowledge becoming dated while on a career break. This rises to 72% of mothers in London.

Millennial mothers expressed the strongest concern about outdated skills, double that of mothers aged 40-51.

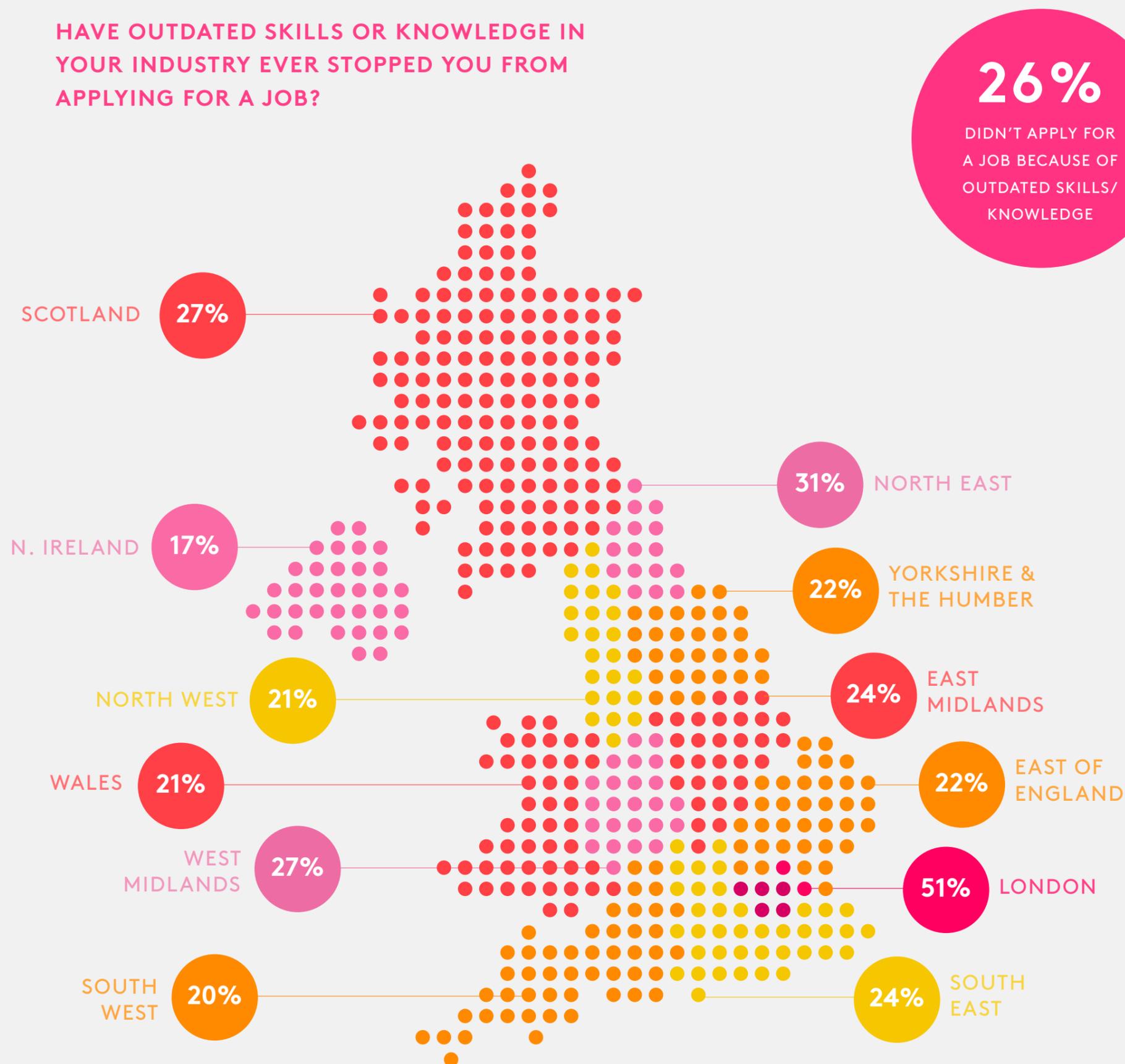


Just over 1 in 4 mothers stated that concern around outdated skills/knowledge put them off applying for a job. This figure rises to 1 in 2 mothers in London.

Our research shows that there are good grounds for them to be worried. 21% of mothers surveyed stated that outdated skills/knowledge had stopped them getting a job they had applied for. This rises to almost half of mothers in London (49%).

Considering competition for roles is tough, this isn't surprising. On average employers received a median of 24 applicants for the last low-skilled vacancy they tried to fill compared with 19 applicants for the last medium-skilled vacancy and 8 applicants for the last high-skilled vacancy they sought to fill⁵.

HAVE OUTDATED SKILLS OR KNOWLEDGE IN YOUR INDUSTRY EVER STOPPED YOU FROM APPLYING FOR A JOB?



Anne-Marie Sochanik

AGE

42

CHILDREN

7 & 5

CAREER BREAK

8 years

PREVIOUS
OCCUPATION

Marketing &
Branding

CURRENT
OCCUPATION

Out of work

LIVES

Islington,
London



When Anne-Marie went on a career break 8 years ago she had years of experience in corporate marketing and branding, so felt reassured she would be able to pick it back up.

When job opportunities looked thin on the ground at home in Devon, the family made the decision to move back to London.

It therefore came as a huge shock when, after applying for 15 jobs, Anne-Marie secured just one interview - a factor she puts down to her outdated skills.

"I have been looking and applying for jobs since January and haven't had any luck, explained Anne Marie.

"I realise that marketing trends have changed since I was last in an office but I had worked for a long time before having my children so hadn't anticipated finding it so difficult."

Our report shows that almost half of mothers in London have been prevented from getting a job due to outdated skills, with the issue also impacting their ability to re-enter the job market at the same seniority level.

"Although I was working in senior roles in marketing in the past I have applied for all different levels of jobs from admin roles to office management and still haven't had any joy", added Anne-Marie.

"It's so demoralising and has had a knock-on effect on my confidence as I'm not even getting an opportunity to add value at any level." said Anne-Marie.

Anne-Marie is now using some of the spare time she has when her children are at school to study for the Digital Mums Foundation in Social Media Marketing.

"I love learning and the course has been great as I've found it really fascinating, explained Anne-Marie.

"Learning has brought some structure to my day and it's good to feel disciplined again and sit down at a desk and study.

"I don't know what the future holds for me, but I know that learning will give me more options."

Returning to low-skilled jobs

It is well documented that mothers end up in more junior and lower skilled roles when they return to work after a career break. How much is this driven by confidence and skills?

A desire for flexibility is a key driver of this return into more junior roles. Our 2017 report showed that 64% of mothers felt that they had compromised their skills and experience to find a flexible job that fitted around childcare. Our new research echoes this, showing the biggest driver is the need for flexible working.

However, 1 in 5 mothers cited a lack of up to date skills/knowledge as a factor in taking a more junior role, which rises to 1 in 4 for 18-30 year olds. 23% stated that confidence was an issue.

Flexible working is clearly not a complete solution. Supporting mothers to build up to date skills and knowledge is an essential piece of the puzzle.

WHAT WERE THE FACTORS WHICH LED TO YOU TAKING A MORE JUNIOR ROLE WHEN RETURNING TO WORK?

STATED THAT A LACK OF UP TO DATE SKILLS WAS A FACTOR IN THEM TAKING A MORE JUNIOR ROLE

20%



OF MOTHERS AGED 18-30 STATED THAT A LACK OF UP TO DATE SKILLS WAS A FACTOR IN THEM TAKING A MORE JUNIOR ROLE

24%



Given there are 3x as many applicants for a low-skilled role than a high-skilled role, the reality is that they are facing stiffer competition for jobs. Therefore, it's no surprise that mothers worry that outdated skills and knowledge are holding them back, are put off applying for roles, or that employers are turning them down when they do apply.

Clearly, skills, knowledge and the confidence that can be delivered from learning is a significant and largely ignored piece of the puzzle. There is a lack of research exploring this issue, with assumptions made that the need for flexible working is the sole driver to women working part-time.

Mothers working in part-time, low-skilled jobs is a major contributor to the gender pay gap. We need to do more to understand to what extent mothers are working in part-time, low skilled roles because low confidence and outdated skills/knowledge mean they struggle to find higher skilled and better paid roles.

“

While on my maternity leave I started to feel behind digitally and felt out of my depth and so I went in search of a way to increase my knowledge.

”

Tori Denyer

Digital Mums graduate

Georgie Krone

AGE

48

CHILDREN

17, 15, 11

CAREER BREAK

10 years

PREVIOUS
OCCUPATION

City Lawyer

CURRENT
OCCUPATION

**Social Media
Trainer**

LIVES

Winchester



Ten years since her last job as a City banking lawyer, Georgie Krone expected it may not be straightforward to return to work.

But what Georgie didn't envisage was being told that she was unemployable and her legal career was over. All because she had taken a career break to have children, leaving her skills outdated.

"I didn't even get my foot back in the door, let alone get anywhere near being offered an interview." explained Georgie.

"I phoned some legal recruitment companies and they said don't bother coming in as nobody will be interested in you as you've been out of work for 10 years and your skills are out of date.

"I made the decision to stay at home with my three children and didn't worry about my career. I thought probably quite naively that I could get a job when I wanted to because I was qualified and I always had been able to."

Our report shows the devastating blow to confidence many women experience on a career break, with Georgie no exception.

"After being told I was unemployable I understandably felt very low in confidence." explained Georgie.

"I went to see one City firm but I think they could see I was terrified and so lacking in confidence. I realised skills had moved on, it was a digital age and I would have to start all over again."

Georgie met with the organisation She's Back, which supports women back into the workplace, and they recommended training with Digital Mums.

Georgie hadn't done any formal learning for 20 years before she started the Digital Mums Diploma in Social Media Management course and found it a huge confidence boost.

"Learning again opened up a whole new world for me," said Georgie.

"It opened my mind, boosted my confidence, gave me new purpose, helped me meet new people and gave me a renewed energy."

Georgie now runs a social media training business from her home in Winchester, Hampshire.

"Upskilling has helped me to do things I never dreamed I'd be doing. My work now is so much more flexible and enjoyable than my law career ever was." added Georgie.

Why we need to get mothers back into 'good work'

Being unemployed is bad for you. There is clear evidence that unemployment is detrimental to both physical and mental health and is associated with an increased risk of mortality and morbidity, including long-term health conditions, cardiovascular disease, poor mental health and suicide⁶.

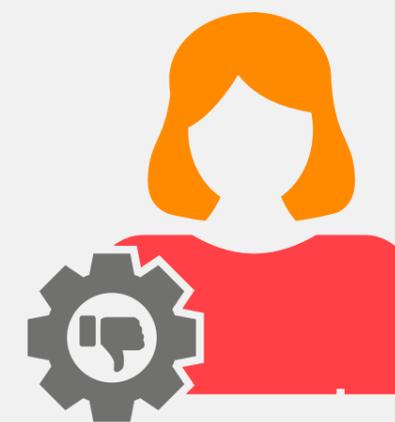
Our survey shows that 74% of mothers who rated their life satisfaction 1 out of 5 have been out of work for 5 years or more, showing a clear correlation between life satisfaction and work.

Conversely, being employed is good for you as long as that work is defined as 'good work' (safe, secure work with good working hours and conditions, supportive management and opportunities to develop). Good work improves health and wellbeing across people's lives and protects

against social exclusion and improves quality of life across the board. It does this through the provision of income, social interaction, a role and a sense of identity and purpose.

The benefits to society and the economy of getting people back into work are also well evidenced.

Based on people returning to employment, there is, per person, a £3,500 financial gain to the individual, £12,000 savings to national government via the exchequer and an overall gain to society of £23,100⁷.



74%

OF MOTHERS WITH LOW LIFE SATISFACTION HAVE BEEN OUT OF WORK FOR 5 YEARS OR MORE



£35,100

IS THE GAIN TO THE UK FOR EVERY PERSON RETURNING TO EMPLOYMENT

Investing in training opportunities to support mothers back into the workplace will deliver a significant return on investment

For every person returning to employment there is a total net gain of £35,100 to the UK. A total of 21% of our respondents were turned down for a role they applied for due to outdated skills or knowledge.

If we take the ONS figure that 1.1m mothers are out of work and want to return to work, this equates to 231,000 mothers that failed to return to employment because of outdated skills or knowledge.

If they had been accepted into these roles the potential net gain to the UK would be £35,100 for each of the 231,000 mothers, which equates to a staggering £8.1bn.

This is purely the net gain from supporting out of work mothers into jobs. More could be gained from supporting mothers that have re-entered the job market but are stuck in low-paid roles because they struggled to get back into work at the same level.



THE POTENTIAL NET GAIN TO THE UK OF SUPPORTING MOTHERS TO UPDATE THEIR SKILLS/KNOWLEDGE

03

Skills and study

Given that the solution to outdated skills and knowledge is participating in adult learning, we surveyed mothers to find out when they had last participating in formal learning.

We know from the Learning and Work Institute's annual Adult Participation in Learning survey that adult participation in learning is the lowest it's been since records began in 1999⁸.

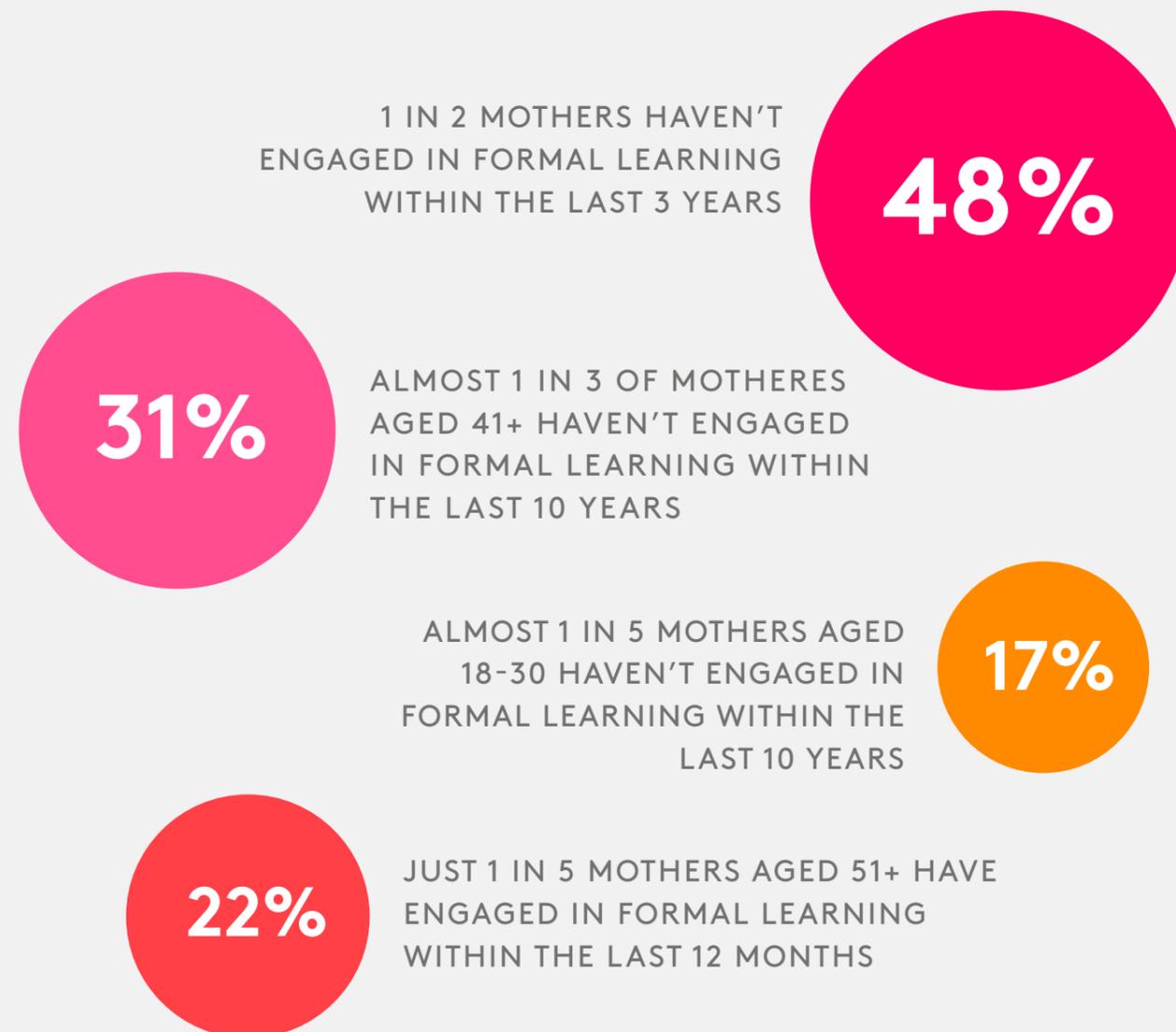
The Learning & Work Institute and WEA also demonstrated that mothers outside of the labour market are under-represented in learning⁹.

We surveyed mothers across the different age demographics to explore this trend further and to examine the underlying reasons for this.

1 in 2 of the mothers we surveyed had not engaged in formal learning within the last 3 years and 1 in 3 mothers over the age of 41 had not engaged in formal learning for 10 years or more.

This chimes with recent data from Avon's Stand4Her report, which showed 50% of UK women had not undertaken any training or self-development (self-funded or otherwise) or gained new skills

or knowledge in the last three years. In this report, worryingly, UK women came bottom of the 15 countries surveyed by Avon and significantly lower than the global average of 71%¹⁰.

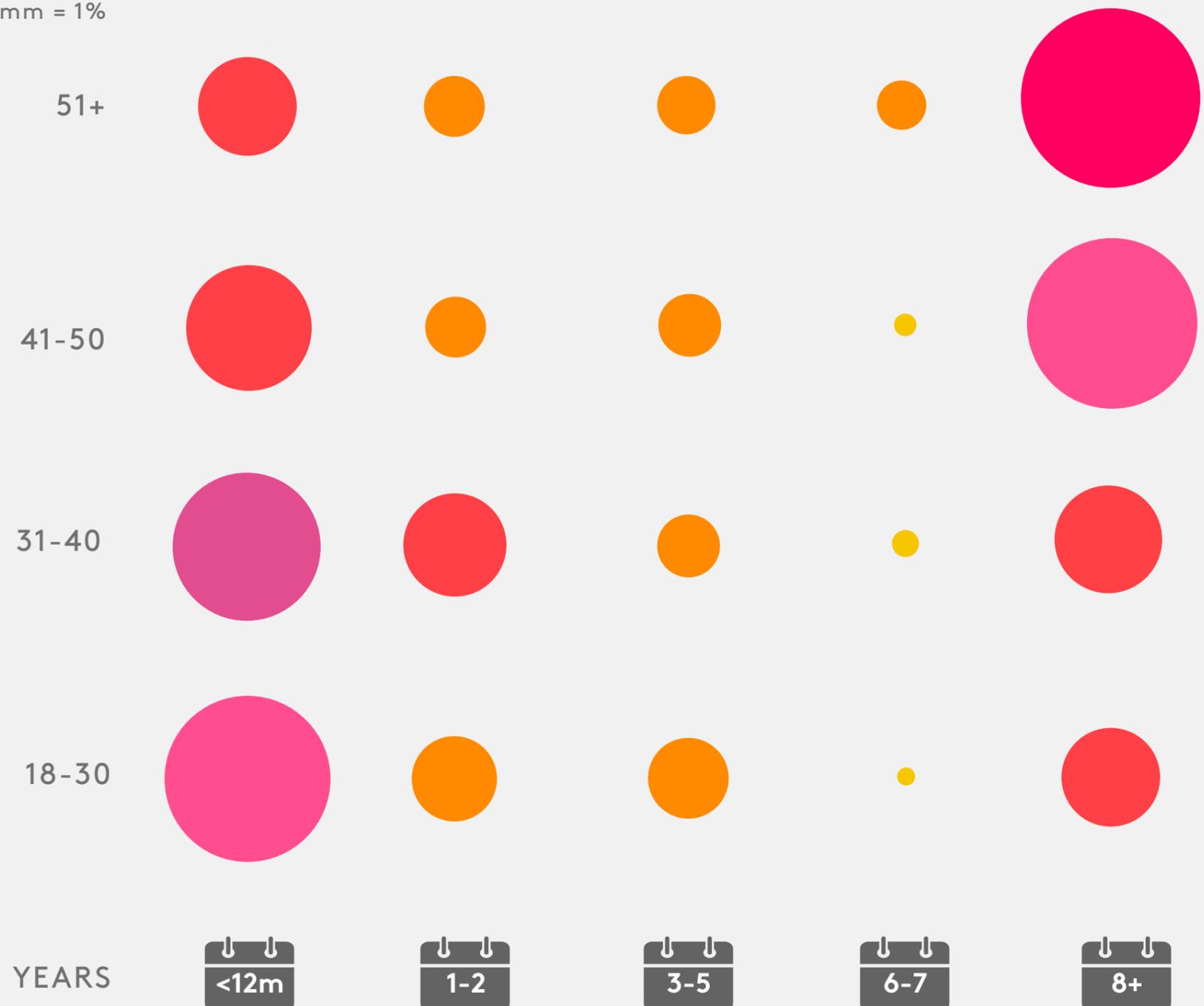


Our data shows a clear correlation between age and engagement in adult learning. Mothers aged 18-30 were far more likely to have engaged in adult learning within the last 3 years. Mothers over 41 were far less likely to have engaged in learning within the last 10 years.

Mothers aged 18-30 are most likely to have invested in formal learning in the last 12 months (37%). This is almost double that of mothers over 51 (22%).

WHEN DID YOU LAST ENGAGE IN FORMAL LEARNING TO UPDATE YOUR SKILLS/ KNOWLEDGE (IN YEARS)

1mm = 1%



“
 We are in a very
 unique time -
 the fast paced
 changes mean
 that if a mother
 stays at home
 for a few years
 everything has
 leaped ahead
 so much in that
 short time.”

Laura Tricker
 Digital Mums
 graduate

A growing concern

The importance of lifelong learning has been growing steadily for decades.

The growing speed of innovation, technological change and globalisation means that every single year that passes, a gap opens up between what an individual currently knows, what has recently been developed/discovered and what they need to know to compete in the job market. This means that if they aren't investing in continual development on an annual basis they are falling behind.

Right now it's estimated that the 'half-life' of a professional skill is around five years and in 2017 experts were predicting that in just 3 years more than one-third of the skills we need will have changed¹¹.

Companies are now working differently, using cutting edge technology to be more agile, as well as increasingly using a flexible freelance workforce. Teams too, are working differently, adopting modern workplace tools like Slack and Trello to work collaboratively, and increasingly remotely.

By 2030, 3 million employed women in the UK are at risk of having their jobs replaced by automation and a further 1-4 million may face a need to transition across occupations or skillsets to remain employed¹².

This new world offers novel job opportunities and avenues for economic advancement. But if knowledge and skills have stagnated, it's more likely that an individual will face risks from these developments, rather than rewards.

This all paints a bleak picture when looking at the growing evidence that mothers aren't learning.

Digital skills

We know that one of the biggest concerns for mothers are their digital skills. Digital skills date quickly and outdated digital skills can cause serious anxiety when re-entering the workplace. Simply seeing an unknown digital tool mentioned in a job description can be enough to put mothers off applying for the role. Even when they succeed in returning to work more than 1 in 3 women are anxious that their digital skills aren't as up to speed as their colleagues and almost 1 in 3 would feel less anxious back at work overall if they could improve their digital skills¹³.

04

Locked out of learning

So we know that study is essential for ensuring skills stay relevant for the modern workplace. We know that mothers worry about their skills dating, are put off applying for roles and are turned down for roles because of outdated skills. But we also know that mothers aren't participating in learning opportunities to build the skills required. We wanted to understand why.

Mothers are often segmented into a single group but our findings show clear differences across the age ranges. Despite there being key differences, however, there are some common themes when exploring the barriers to learning.

Common barriers

Financial | Mothers struggle financially and can't afford the course fees required.

Time | Mothers state that they simply don't have the time to invest in learning.

Headspace | Mothers find they don't have the headspace to juggle learning, even if they could carve out time.

Confidence in abilities | Mothers state they don't have the confidence to learn or believe they are too old to learn.

Mental health | Mental health and anxiety are a significant barrier to learning.

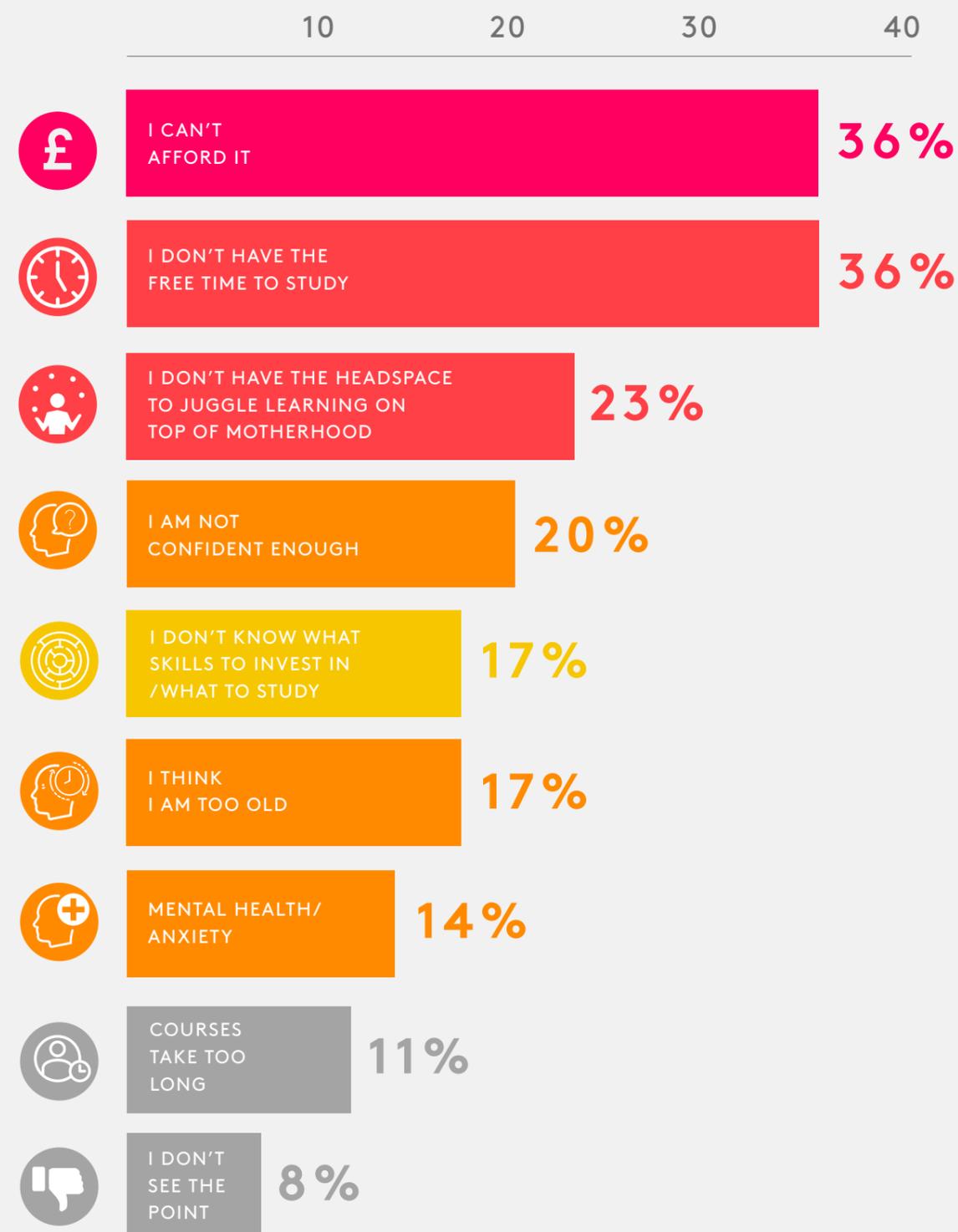
Strategic | Mothers struggle to know what they should be learning and which skills to invest in learning.

Less than 1 in 10 mothers felt that they didn't see the point in learning. However, it's important to note that while just 4% of mothers aged 18-30 stated they didn't see the point of learning, this jumps to 13% for mothers over 51.

We explored each of the major themes in more detail, grouped into the following three areas:

- 1. Financial barriers** Not being able to afford course fees.
- 2. Practical barriers** Lacking the time and headspace to study.
- 3. Psychological barriers** A crisis of confidence around abilities and overcoming mental health issues to take advantage of learning.

WHAT BARRIERS EXIST THAT ARE STOPPING YOU ENGAGING IN FORMAL LEARNING TO UPDATE YOUR SKILLSET?



Recommendations

We recommend the Government provides every woman returner with a 'back to work' bursary to support them to invest in skills-based study.

Employers should provide training bursaries for women going on maternity leave.



MOTHERS CAN'T AFFORD TO LEARN AND THIS IS A BIGGER PROBLEM FOR YOUNGER MOTHERS



42%

OF MOTHERS AGED 18-30



37%

OF MOTHERS AGED 31-40



36%

OF MOTHERS AGED 41-50



29%

OF MOTHERS AGED 51+

Financial barriers

Our research shows that for all age groups apart from the over 51s, cost is the biggest barrier to study. 42% of 18-30 year olds, 37% of 31-40 year olds and 36% of 41-50 year olds stated that they can't afford to study.

Courses designed to build skills are usually the most expensive as they involve a greater investment of time and resources from the learning provider. The more expensive the course the bigger the barrier but it's these skills-based courses that are crucial for supporting women returners, in particular.

These findings aren't shocking when considering the breadth of evidence around existing financial struggles for UK residents.

Stagnant wages and rising prices

The Resolution Foundation states that weak wage growth and rising prices have hit the living standards of UK residents to the level generally only seen in a deep recession¹⁴.

Rising debt

A 2019 report by the TUC showed a major rise in unsecured household debt now averaging £15,385 per home. The OECD reported that 1 in 5 middle-income households spend more than they earn¹⁵.

Increased housing costs

The UK has seen the largest fall in home ownership of any country in the EU over recent years. House prices have been growing 3x faster than median household income over the last two decades. This has had a knock on effect to inflate monthly housing costs. Findings from Santander show that the average monthly rent in the UK is £912/

household compared to monthly mortgage repayments of £723/ household equating to a difference of £2,268 annually. This rises to a difference of £3,468 annually for Londoners¹⁶.

High commuting costs

The cost of commuting in the UK is on average, 14% of a monthly salary, compared to 2% in France and 3% in Germany¹⁷.

Skyrocketing childcare costs

We have the highest childcare costs in the world with 33.8% of family net income being spent on childcare (against OECD average of 12.6%)¹⁸. A nursery place for a child under two costs an average of just over £6,600/year part-time and £12,500/year full-time (jumping to just over £9,000 and £17,000 respectively for families living in London).

AVERAGE ANNUAL OUTGOINGS FOR A FAMILY



Mounting bills

The increase in wages simply isn't keeping up with the increase in bills. The 2018 average annual food cost for a typical UK household was around £4,753 in 2018 (based on the average 2.4 people per household). The average UK household spent another £1,170 per year on gas and electricity in 2018. The cost to light, heat and run our homes accounts for

close to 5% of our household budgets each year^{19, 20, 21}.

With other costs like family holidays and Christmas it's not surprising that mothers are struggling to find the money to invest in themselves.

The squeezed millennials

A wealth of evidence points to younger people being the hardest hit by financial challenges, including:

Rising debt | KPMG found 1 in 5 UK adults aged between 25-34 spend over 60% of their monthly income the day they get paid²². This age group are 3x more likely to end the month having spent all their monthly income or to be in debt. 42% said that debt repayments are a significant chunk of their outgoings.

Increased housing costs |

2018 ONS analysis showed just 27% of 22-29 year olds have made it onto the property ladder, falling year on year.

This trend is reflected in our data. 42% of 18-30 year old mothers can't afford to update their skills but this drops to 29% of 51+ respondents.

Recommendations

The budget available for adult skills (not including apprenticeships) is falling year on year. At a time when adult participation needs to be at its highest, it's actually the lowest it's been in 20 years.

Government needs to invest in this area to reverse the trend.



Laura Tricker

AGE

36

CHILDREN

9, 7 & 1

CAREER BREAK

10 years

PREVIOUS OCCUPATION

Textiles
Designer

CURRENT OCCUPATION

Social Media
Marketer

LIVES

Deal



Laura lived a creative existence in London as a Textiles Designer before meeting her husband and moving to the coast to raise their three children.

She took a career break and happily got lost in motherhood but when she awoke the world of design had gone digital. She just didn't have the skills to compete.

"When I left London the digital world was new and hadn't yet transformed the way most designers worked" explained Laura.

"I took a long career break. I was a bit naive about how things would change and move on and what that would mean for me. I haven't had a proper job for 10 years and hadn't done any learning since my Textiles Degree in 2006.

"When I was ready to go back to work I started applying for design jobs but I didn't get any of them. All the designers and agencies were using new software and were selling their designs on websites and on social media. I had no experience of that at all. I felt really left behind.

The accelerating pace of digital change over the past decade means Laura's story is all too familiar. Dated digital skills are a major driver of the 'career break, career broken' themes outlined in this report.

"I had to go back to work as we really needed the money. But my only option was taking a minimum wage job and giving up the creativity that I loved about my career.

"I came across the Digital Mums vocational social media course and I was desperate to

do it but there was no way I could afford it. I wasn't in a position to borrow any more money I was already in debt from being out of work. It felt like learning was for rich people.

Luckily for Laura, she spotted an opportunity to receive a free place on the course, as part of our partnership with Studio.co.uk. Studio.co.uk is the nation's leading multi-range value retailer, stocking products ranging from clothing and electrical to household and gifts. They provided funding for women on a career break to study with us as part of their commitment to support them to upskill.

Laura lights up "The Studio opportunity has meant so much to me. I am able to talk with confidence and knowledge and it's great to feel like an expert in such a cutting-edge field. I already have a digital marketing job lined up.

"It's also made me realise what I have been missing out on. I now never want to stop learning. It has lifted me up. The ripple effect impacts your happiness, your partner's happiness. Studio has done such an amazing thing to offer me this opportunity I will never forget it".

Practical barriers

The barrier to learning that comes up in our conversations with mothers again and again is a lack of time and critically a lack of headspace to take advantage of learning opportunities. Mothers are time poor. If they can find a few hours for study they are juggling a number of spinning plates and learning something new requires the mental focus that many feel they simply don't have.

This anecdotal evidence is backed up by our study.

Around 1 in 3 mothers across all age ranges feel that lack of time is a major barrier to learning (38%, 38%, 33% and 34% respectively).

Around 1 in 4 mothers between the ages of 18 and 50 feel that lack of headspace is a significant barrier to learning (24%, 25%, 23%).

Recommendations

We recommend the Government radically reforms the delivery model of apprenticeships, with suitable placements to be delivered 100% online. This makes them accessible for mothers.

Learning providers and employers need to ensure learning opportunities can be flexibly accessed.

Employers should offer flexible working arrangements for mothers undergoing study to enable them to fit learning into their lives.



“

Life as a mum can be one giant routine. I would start my day very, very early at 5am after being up a lot of the night with my son. My daughter would be up sprightly and ready to play and take on the day. My morning would be full of chores. We'd maybe go to the park and then it was planning for dinner time and mountains of washing. It's hard.

”

Tori Denyer
Digital Mums graduate

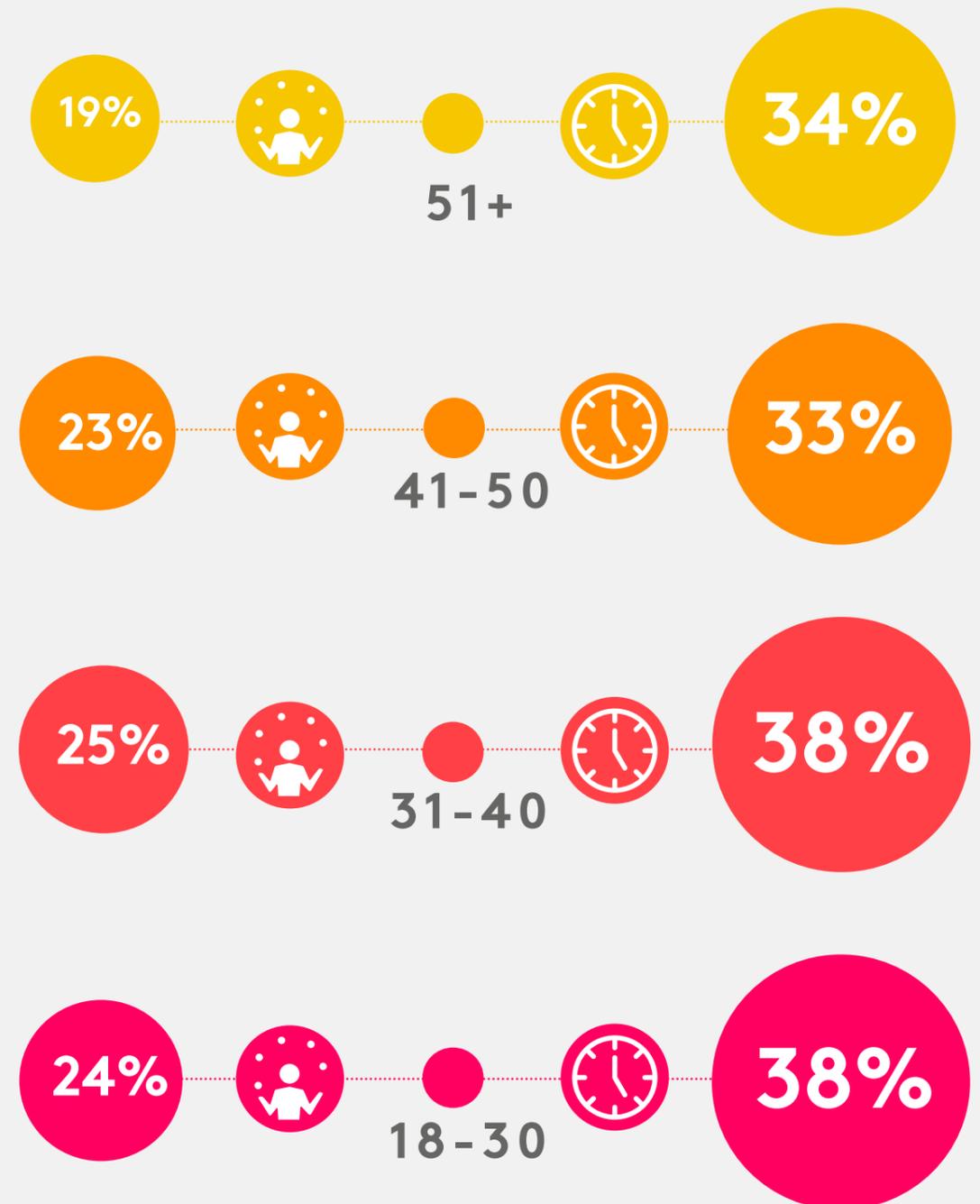


NOT ENOUGH HEADSPACE



NOT ENOUGH TIME

WHAT BARRIERS EXIST THAT ARE STOPPING YOU ENGAGING IN FORMAL LEARNING TO UPDATE YOUR SKILLSET?



According to our favourite statistician Caroline Criado-Perez women carry a larger burden than men.

In the UK, women do almost twice as many hours of unpaid work a day as men. This means that UK men have a whopping five hours more leisure time than women per week²⁴. That's a lot of time that could be spent learning new skills.

And with the ageing population, older people are often being cared for by their children. And once again it is women that are carrying the additional care load. So not only are they caring for their children they are also caring for their parents (and often their husband's parents). Women make up 70% of all unpaid dementia carers in the UK and are 2.5 times more likely than men to be on-call around the clock as a carer²⁵.

Almost 9 in 10 women said they felt solely responsible for organising schedules of the family. 7 in 10 said they were solely responsible for "invisible labour" such as family routines, who needs to be where and when, what needs to be packed, and anticipating and planning for the future. This all necessitates mental and emotional effort. 2 in 3 felt it was mainly their responsibility for managing their children's health and emotional well-being²⁶.

So it's really no surprise that women are telling us they simply don't have the time or headspace to learn something new.

There is no denying that learning something new is going to be a challenge for busy women and particularly for busy mothers. This becomes even more of a challenge when training courses are face to face and set at inconvenient times.

“

Headspace is really hard to find. You can't organise headspace like you can organise time. There are ways to find extra time, for example, postponing things or reprioritising. There are loads of books and tools to help you. When my head is overflowing I can't concentrate on anything.

”

Kelly Jacobson-Collins
Digital Mums graduate

“

Learning has done so much for my self esteem. I used to get nervous when I met new people and now I don't think twice about walking into a networking event or going to a new client meeting. I couldn't have done that five years ago. I didn't have the confidence and I felt like I had been out of the workplace too long and had lost a lot of self esteem. ”

Kate Peers

Digital Mums graduate

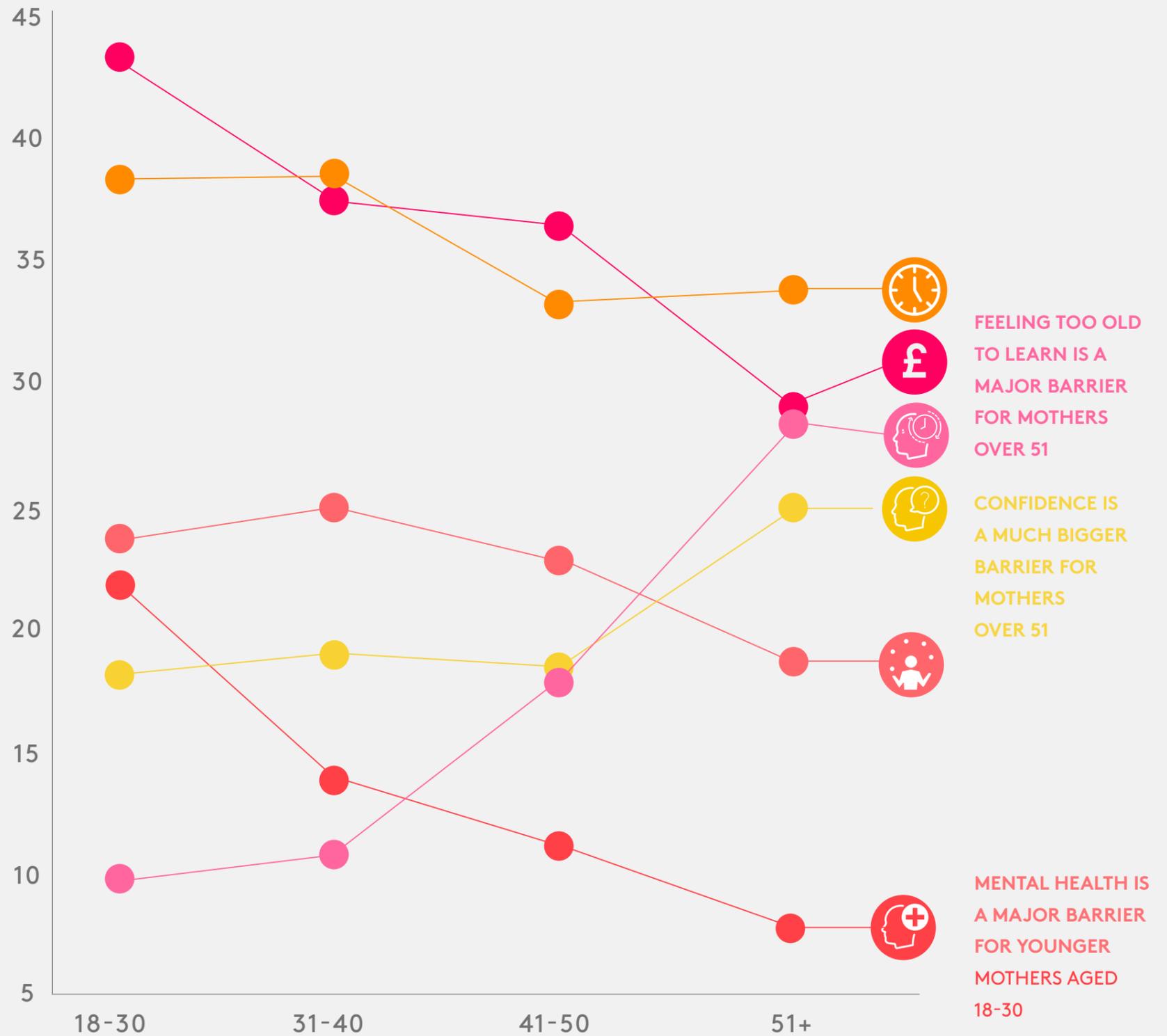
Psychological barriers

In the previous sections we summarised the issues mothers face around being time poor, carrying heavy mental and emotional loads, and dealing with financial worries. Our data shows that these are creating major barriers to learning. But there is another set of barriers as yet unexplored that are linked with these struggles.

Confidence

Our study shows that confidence issues were hardest felt by older mothers with 25% of mothers over the age of 51 lacked the confidence to learn something new, and 28% saying they felt they were too old to learn. However, almost 1 in 5 18-30 year olds lacked confidence and 1 in 10 felt they were too old to learn so this is a significant issue across the board.

A 2017 study²⁷ demonstrated mothers of young children showed decreasing self-esteem from pregnancy, hitting a low point when their children are three. This is also the most common time to take a career break to care for children when they are young and evidence shows that women's self-confidence drops during a career break. Research shows that women on maternity leave start to lose confidence in their ability to return to work just 11 months after giving birth. It's likely this significantly impacts their confidence around learning new skills.



Francesca Burney

AGE

49

CHILDREN

19, 17 & 14

CAREER BREAK

18 years

PREVIOUS
OCCUPATION

Secretary

CURRENT
OCCUPATION

**Social Media
Marketer**

LIVES

Dorset



After divorcing from her husband, Francesca found that she needed to get a job and fast. Despite being out of the workplace for almost two decades she had a wealth of previous administrative experience, two degrees and a Masters, so initially she wasn't worried.

Francesca wasn't prepared for the struggle that lay ahead and found it had a major impact on her confidence.

"Over the last two years I have been for interview after interview and I would get turned down every time. I applied for one administrative role after another but I just didn't get anywhere. In the end it became a sort of not very funny joke" Francesca laughed.

"My divorce had already dented my confidence and then facing rejection after rejection for jobs that I knew I could do made things so much worse."

On Facebook one day Francesca saw an opportunity to study on our Digital Mums vocational social media course, as part of our partnership with Studio.co.uk. Studio.co.uk is the nation's leading multi-range value retailer, stocking products ranging from clothing and electrical to household and gifts. They provided funding for women on a career break to study with us as part of their commitment to support them to upskill.

Francesca had lost so much confidence that she almost didn't apply. Our research shows that she isn't alone, particularly among women in her age range. 18% of women aged 41-50 cited confidence as a major barrier to study and this rises to 25% for women 51 and over.

"I saw the Studio opportunity come up but I just wasn't sure if I could take another

rejection. The resistance that I felt was huge and I just wasn't sure if I could get over the fear.

"But I knew this was my only opportunity. It would have been a struggle but I could just have afforded the fee if I'd put it on a credit card. But my lack of confidence made it feel so much more expensive as it felt like such a risk. Despite all the stories of graduates finding work afterwards I wasn't convinced that I would be one of them. When you lack confidence in yourself it's insidious. It seeps into every area of your life."

Francesca did apply, is now about to graduate and already has a job.

"The Studio opportunity was so huge for me and has impacted me on so many levels. Even being accepted and seeing that Digital Mums had faith in my abilities was so powerful for me. I actually find it hard to put into words, it's been so amazing.

"Doing this course has enabled me to step up to the plate in so many other areas of my life. I am more assertive. It's so liberating. I never thought this would happen as a result of doing the course."

"I have just started my first job working for a

Mental health and anxiety

Conversely, our study shows that mental health and anxiety were of most concern for younger mothers with 22% of 18-30 year olds citing this as a barrier to learning. This drops to just 7% of mothers over 51.

A recent study found that millennials report more stress and anxiety than any other generation. And data shows that working mothers are more stressed than other people – 18% more for mothers with one child, and 40% more for mothers with two children.

Mothers and mindsets

It's likely that all the barriers discussed so far, the financial pressures, additional mental and emotional burdens, loss of confidence and self-esteem and increased stress and anxiety, when combined negatively impact on their overall mindset.

Learning and mindset are closely linked. A successful learner has a growth mindset, a belief that they can succeed and searches out opportunities to stretch themselves. They see challenge as an opportunity for growth and aren't put off by failure. Our data shows that mothers are stressed, squeezed and suffer from low self-esteem - not qualities that contribute to the mental resilience required for a growth mindset.

“

I have a son who has just had a diagnosis of ADHD and autism and for the last four years I have been trying to get him support at nursery and school. That has really taken its toll on my own mental health and has caused a huge amount of anxiety and stress. ”

Kate Peers

Digital Mums graduate

05

Why lean in to learning?

Evidence shows adult learning delivers the following benefits:

- 1. Employment benefits** including increased income and job satisfaction and in some cases access to flexible working.
- 2. Positive changes in mental health and emotional wellbeing** including increased confidence and self-esteem.

This is backed up by our own social impact research we conducted with our graduates in 2018 where we demonstrated significant improvements across a range of employment and emotional wellbeing factors²⁸.

Employment benefits

There is a large evidence base linking learning to a range of employment benefits, particularly for learning that is skills-focused.

Research^{29,30} shows learning new skills:

- **Helps those out of work to get a job** | Whether on a career break or unemployed, participating in adult learning (particularly skills-based training) moves people back into the labour market.
- **Helps people increase their lifetime earnings** | 29% of women who completed an adult learning course indicated that they had got a better job, while 12% of women indicated that they had received a promotion.
- **Increases your job satisfaction** | A study shows that 58% of women who completed an adult learning course indicated that they were receiving more satisfaction from their job.

“

Learning is life changing. If you had seen me a year and a half ago, I was a completely different person. I feel like I could earn whatever I want to earn now, because if I continue learning and continue my personal development, the sky's the limit.

”

Jodie Hayward
Digital Mums graduate



Hear from Jodie Hayward who transformed her earning potential, going from bouncer to Facebook Ad Strategist.



Hear from Suzy Dierckx who crafted her perfect flexible career that works around her three children.



Hear from Jenny Procter who future proofed her traditional marketing career by upskilling in digital marketing.



Hear from Ruth Thomson who found her dream job through lifelong learning.

Emotional wellbeing benefits

Adult learning fosters a greater level of emotional wellbeing and positive changes in mental health.

Mental health problems are one of the main causes of the overall disease burden worldwide. It is estimated that 1 in 6 people in the past week experienced a common mental health problem.

The NHS recommends learning for mental wellbeing. Evidence^{31, 32} shows that learning:

- Increases our self-esteem.
- Encourages social interaction.
- Gives us a sense of hope and purpose in life.
- Makes us better able to cope with stress.

Research shows that working mothers are more stressed than other people – 18% more, in fact, and this figure rises to 40% for those with two children³². Our data also shows mothers struggling with confidence issues. The potential of learning to improve these outcomes for mothers is clear.

We feel these benefits have significant impact, particularly when looking at young mothers suffering from mental health and anxiety issues and for older women suffering from confidence issues. The outcomes are even more powerful when the learning is linked to them getting back into the workforce after an extensive career break. 34% of the mothers we surveyed have been unemployed for 10 years or more.

It's not impossible to transform the career prospects of these women, with the right training opportunities as our case studies demonstrate. Many of the women we train get back into work after a long career break. However, with data showing less than 5% of adult education funding goes to people over 50³⁴. It's no wonder that evidence shows the rates of participation in adult learning decline sharply after 45.

According to the Centre for Ageing Better's "State of Ageing" report³⁵ we have an ageing population and if we want those over 50 and 60 to be financially secure and happy, we need to ensure they can work for as long as they want to, free from age bias and discrimination. So is adult learning the answer to better ageing for older women?



Hear from Kate Peers who has seen first hand how learning delivers positive benefits to emotional wellbeing.



Hear from Debbie Friend who found a whole new sense of purpose and identity in her 50s after a 24 year career break.

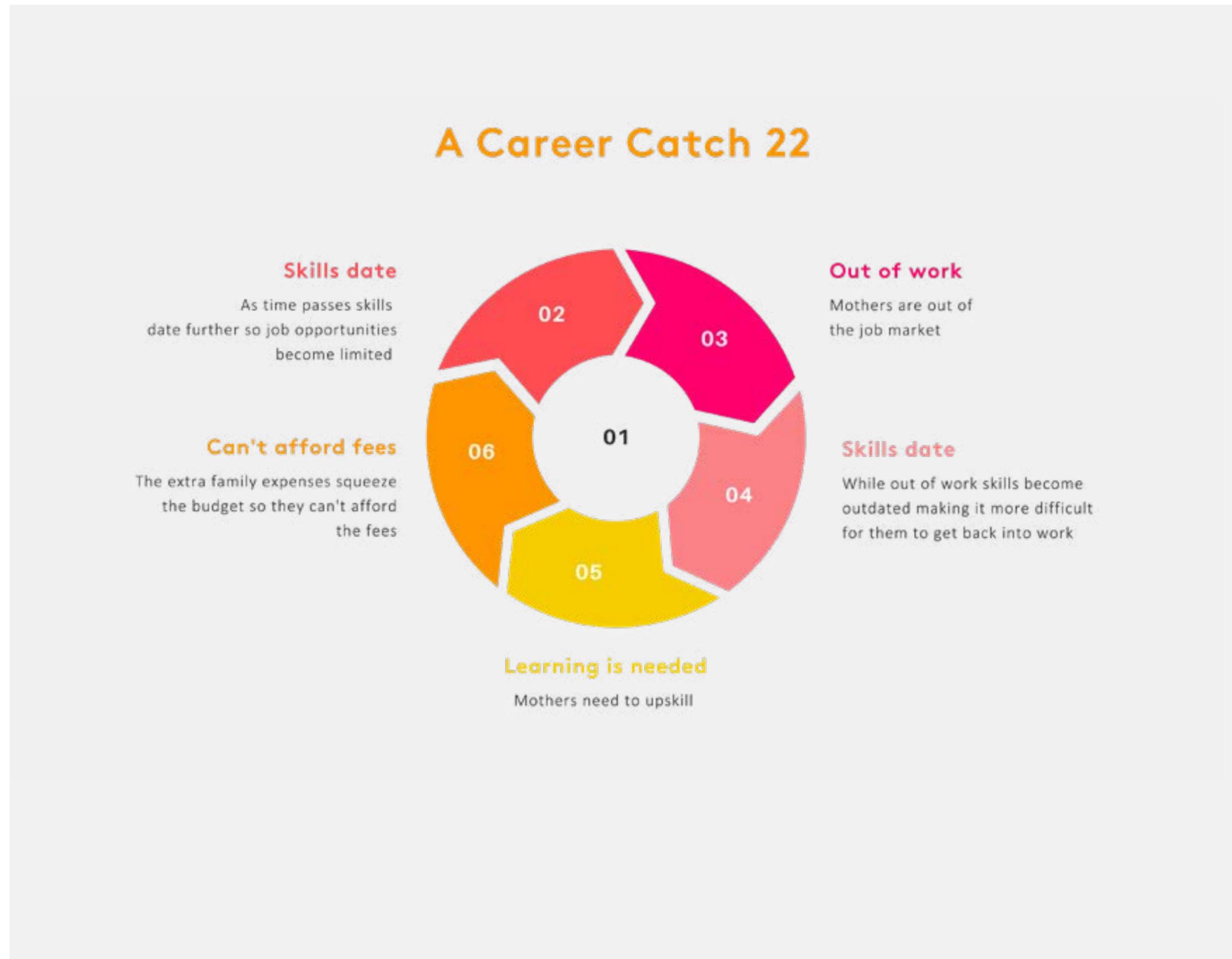


Hear from Tori Denyer who updated her digital skills while on maternity leave and gained an unexpected boost to her confidence and self-esteem as a result.

A Career Catch 22

So far this report evidences the very real struggles mothers face with accessing employment opportunities, with financial, practical and psychological barriers.

Given that adult learning has the potential to positively impact all these areas it's clear that access to study opportunities could be the answer to solving some of the issues they face. Yet we have also shown that these very same challenges create insurmountable barriers accessing these opportunities resulting in a learning "Catch 22" for mothers in the UK.



Pratiksha Patel

AGE

39

CHILDREN

A 2 year-old

CAREER BREAK

7 months

PREVIOUS OCCUPATION

English
Teacher

CURRENT OCCUPATION

Out of work

LIVES

Scottish
Highlands



Before Pratiksha Patel took a career break to have her son she was working as an English secondary school teacher in London - a job she adored and excelled at.

Two years on and now living in the Scottish Highlands, she is facing the prospect of ditching the career she has worked so hard for because it's proving impossible to find teaching work without upskilling.

"I have been told that I will need to do further training to be able to teach in Scotland at the same level", explained Pratiksha.

"But we have no support or family to rely on here and so I am facing the impossible task of having to fit in training, alongside working and looking after my son."

"I feel quite resentful. I never realised I would feel so behind in my career after having a child. I still want to progress but how do you manage it all?"

Like many of the women we spoke to for this report, Pratiksha is facing a 'Learning Catch 22'. Pratiksha can't get a job because she needs to upskill, but she doesn't have the resources or time to learn.

"There aren't any nurseries up here and I recently finally found a childminder but for only two days a week- which

isn't enough to do training and part-time work, explained Pratiksha.

"The situation does put you off your career and your passions, I'm a qualified teacher but I have been looking at working at the local supermarket.

"There's so much more that I want to do and yes it would be challenging with my child, but I just can't believe how hard it is. The longer you're out of the system, the harder it is to get back in.

"I didn't realise that I would have to fight for the things I used to take for granted. I would love there to be more support."

06

Our recommendations

The data in this report provides compelling evidence of the importance of adult learning as a vehicle for supporting mothers to re-enter the workplace. We have also shown how mothers face multiple barriers that stop them from engaging with adult learning. This means they find themselves in a frustrating career Catch 22, unable to get back to work because they lack skills and unable to acquire these skills because they lack the ability to study.

So what's the solution?

Interestingly, despite mothers often being lumped into one amorphous group, our research shows distinct differences across the age ranges. There is no one-size-fits-all solution.

However, some interventions could improve the situation across the board.

Improving the adult learning participation rates for mothers will require solutions from government, employers and learning providers themselves. Our recommendations reflect this.

For government

Increasing investment in adult skills provision

Overall, we must have more investment in adult learning.

Spending via the Adult Skills Budget fell by 41% between 2010/11 and 2015/16. Changes in 2016/17 saw apprenticeship funding separated out and the Adult Education Budget created. This new budget is set to fall by around 3% by the end of 2019/20³⁶. At a time when adult participation needs to be at its highest, to reflect the fast-changing society we live in, it's actually the lowest it's been in 20 years and the budget available for adult skills (not accounting for apprenticeships) is falling year on year.

At Digital Mums we saw learners approach us with funding from Professional Career Development

Loans (PCDLs) if they could not afford the course fees. While this system was far from perfect it did provide some support for low-income students to access our learning opportunities. PCDLs were discontinued and are no longer available.

Introduce 'back to work' bursaries

In terms of supporting mothers specifically, and particularly mothers that are out of work, we would recommend providing every woman returner with a 'back to work' bursary to support them to invest in skills-based study.

Some of the criticisms of personal health budgets in the NHS is that the scheme benefits better educated and more motivated patients who are able to research evidence-

based approaches and make smart decisions on how to spend their allowances. Our research shows that mothers struggle to know what skills to invest in and it's likely that better educated and more motivated learners will benefit more from a personalised learning budget. To avoid this happening the Government should ensure we learn from early stage evidence about the benefits and drawbacks of personal health budgets.

In light of this early evidence, we recommend that this 'back to work' bursary doesn't just include a stipend to spend on training but also includes a set of career coaching sessions specifically focused on supporting women returners to navigate the complex learning environment and to help them make decisions about which courses to invest in as well as to set learning

We recommend providing every woman returner with a 'back to work' bursary to support them to invest in skills-based study.

Mothers require highly flexible learning solutions. We need to create 100% online digital apprenticeships for mothers.

goals, career goals and to focus on building confidence.

As we have stated there is, per person returning to work, a £35,100 gain to society so there is a strong return on investment case for providing 'back to work' bursaries for skills-based courses that are proven to get graduates back into work.

We recommend that the Government invest in a trial of 'back to work' bursaries with mothers that are out of work but want to work, across different age and socio-economic demographics and lengths of career break.

A radical reform of some apprenticeships to an online delivery model

With the adult apprenticeship budget set to increase by around 47%, prioritising adult education spent into apprenticeships is problematic for mothers without changing the way apprenticeships are marketed and also delivered.

Firstly, there is a common misconception amongst the population that apprenticeships are for young people only. More needs to be done to communicate the reality of opportunities on offer. Secondly, mothers require highly flexible learning solutions, as discussed. The vast majority of apprenticeships are full time, starting at 9 or 9:30am and finishing at 5/5:30pm and apprentices are required to be in the place of work during this time. This is extremely problematic for mothers.

Other organisations with expertise in this area, such as the Learning & Work Institute and the WEA, have recommended more flexibility in apprenticeships with regards to part-time and flexible hours but at Digital Mums we recommend going further than this. If the role that the apprenticeship is training for could feasibly be done remotely then why not offer online delivery models for the apprenticeship placement itself. We have trained almost 800 mothers to learn advanced social media marketing skills 100% remotely on 24 week placements with businesses and charities using an innovative online learning model. This could be scaled up and applied to other apprenticeship roles.

More support for innovative, independent learning providers

The Government must ensure adult learning budgets can be more easily spent with independent and innovative learning providers.

Accessing government funding is incredibly complicated. Applying to be on the Education & Skills Funding Agency is too big a challenge. The system is incredibly bureaucratic and biases classroom-based delivery models and static curriculums that do not lend themselves well to teaching the most in-demand, cutting edge skills needed in the UK today.

The Government needs to do more to facilitate this process and to recognise the benefits of supporting innovative provision in the independent sector. Funding routes

should be simplified and streamlined to aid the entry of more innovative provision.

More research into the link between maternal unemployment and structural unemployment

When researching this report we could find little research exploring the extent to which maternal discrimination in the world of work is a structural unemployment issue due to women taking career breaks to care for children. We need more research into the evidence and possible solutions.

We recommend the Government Equalities Office investigate this issue in more detail, conducting a wider scale examination of outdated skills/knowledge as a key driver of maternal unemployment/inactivity and the gender pay gap. We recommend horizon scanning to pull together best practice from around the world to explore innovative solutions.

The Government Equalities Office should investigate the issues discussed in this report in more detail. We recommend they invest in research to expand the evidence-base and pull together best practice from around the world to learn from.

For Employers

Provide a training bursary to all women going off on maternity leave

We have provided evidence that women lose confidence while on maternity leave and worry about going back to work. Providing a training bursary for mothers to invest in adult learning to rebuild confidence and a refresh of skills while they are away from the workplace is a great way to counteract this. This should be completely optional.

Providing a training budget to women about to go on maternity leave also reassures them that you are invested in them as

employees, counteracting the negative rhetoric around maternal discrimination that women face when leaving to have a baby.

When providing training opportunities ensure you consider the needs of mothers

It's crucial to design your learning and development programmes around the needs of mothers. Avoid in-person training days that run from 9-5, for example, which make it difficult to fit around the school run. Also, consider your part-time workers when providing classroom-based training and avoid running training on the same day every week, which means

“ I returned to work 4 days a week and the ongoing training you get as a teacher through your school as part of your profession was scheduled on the day I didn't work. There was no opportunity given for me to be given that training retrospectively or to be even included in that training it felt like just because I didn't work on a Monday and that was the day for training that opportunity wasn't there for me. So I felt like I missed out on a year of professional training. ”

Pratiksha Patel

Former Secondary School English Teacher

some part-time workers can't access these. Finally, invest in your part-time staff in the same way as you invest in your full-time staff. Part-time hours doesn't mean part-time attitudes.

When providing training opportunities ensure you provide flexible working options to help mothers take advantage of them

For mothers that are in the workplace take note of their practical barriers around time and headspace. It's pointless to offer learning opportunities without offering some element of flexibility for them to fit this into their life. This is particularly true of women that are working for you full-time. Whether you enable them to have more flexibility in their role in general for the duration of the training, or whether you reduce their workload to free up study during work is something that should be discussed and agreed together.

Invest in women returnships that offer accredited skills-based learning opportunities

There has been a big buzz around companies investing in women returnships to support mothers back into the workplace. According to the Women Returners Network there were 44 Returnship schemes run in 2018. However, there is little evidence that these translate into impact and outcomes for women.

Few programmes can guarantee the returner a job and we hear from many participants that were not hired at the end of their returnship.

To counter any potential negative impact of a returnship programme we recommend building an accredited, skills-based training course into the returnship programme where learning can be translated and transferred to the wider job market should participants not be hired.

Another big issue with returnships is also they are usually full-time and office-based and any roles for graduates of the programmes are also full time and office-based. Employers need to offer part-time returnship options because a lack of flexible working is often the reason women left in the first place.

Ensure your women returnship programmes have accredited, skills-based training elements that provide transferable benefits should the graduate not be hired.

For Learning Providers

Design courses to help mothers overcome the barriers they face to learning

Always take mothers into account when designing learning opportunities.

Offline opportunities

All too often courses are offered between 9-5 or, even worse for mothers, evening classes between 6pm and 8pm. 6-8pm represents one of the most challenging slots for mothers juggling meal preparation, bathtime and bedtime routines. Finding childcare during these times is particularly challenging and even for those mothers with supportive partners, many partners in full-time work don't make it home in time to provide relief for learning.

Jenny's learning podcast (linked in previous section) perfectly illustrated this challenge when she told us about a CIPD event on flexible working being offered in the evening after work, which is literally the worst timing for mothers and ironic given the topic of the event.

For face to face courses, short courses during the day, fitting around school hours, are the best option for mothers.

Online opportunities

In our experience, while we recognise online courses aren't ideal for all learner demographics, for many mothers providing online courses with short bite-sized lessons that are mobile optimised are the most accessible format for many mothers.

Enabling mothers to fit learning in while on-the-go works well, offering formats that enable multi-tasking such as audio lessons, rather than long, text-based lesson formats.

8pm is by far the preferred slot for in-depth or interactive sessions. For most mothers, the children are in bed or can be supervised by a partner while they engage in deep learning.

We recommend auditing existing provision and conducting research with parents to ascertain whether you are unknowingly presenting barriers to mothers engaging in the learning opportunities you offer.

We also recommend building in co-design processes when designing new learning opportunities, whether through survey feedback or focus groups with mothers/parents.

Ensure you aren't unknowingly locking mothers out of your learning opportunities. Mothers require highly flexible solutions. Ensure offline training isn't running at inconvenient times. Explore accessible, online learning options.

Encourage mothers onto the learning ladder by providing free taster lessons/courses

Providing free, accessible learning opportunities such as taster lessons and free short courses helps mothers overcome their main barrier of cost.

Ensuring these are short and bite-sized courses, or single taster lessons with clear learning outcomes, helps mothers overcome their practical barriers around time and headspace.

Support mothers to overcome confidence issues and issues around being too old to learn by marketing them in the right way and ensure they are accessible and delivered in a nurturing environment.

By encouraging mothers to engage in these courses they see the benefits and in our experience are more likely to engage in further learning opportunities later. Once on the learning ladder they are more likely to progress further.

Build a culture of inclusivity for all mothers

Ensure that you have an organisational culture that is inclusive of mothers and doesn't knowingly put them off studying with you.

Anecdotally, one of our graduates was keen to study a top digital User Experience Design course with a renowned innovative learning provider. However, when speaking to their sales team she was discouraged from applying as she said she would need to leave 10 minutes before 5pm when the course day finished to pick up her children. He questioned her commitment to study if she was also juggling a family life. Her impression was that she didn't fit the "young, digital native" mould so wasn't encouraged to participate.

Negative stereotypes about mothers can be damaging in the learning sphere it seems, just as they can be damaging in the workplace.

It's important to address this with marketing, sales and delivery teams to build a culture of inclusivity for mothers. Given they already face multiple barriers it may be easier than you think to 'put them off'.

One thing we have learned at Digital Mums is that you need to ensure your imagery reflects the learners you want to attract. We struggled to bring older women onto our courses so we conducted research to find out why. They felt that our courses were aimed at young mothers and on exploration this was primarily because of the imagery we used in our marketing materials. We now ensure we use a spread of different age ranges, socio-economic demographics and BAME backgrounds to be as inclusive as possible. We recommend you revisit your marketing materials to ensure that learners see themselves reflected back at them.

Encourage mothers onto the learning ladder by providing free taster lessons/courses that are accessible and engaging.

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